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How Identity Is Constructed: An Analysis of Four Case Studies

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ABSTRACT - Cultural relocation can be seen as a catalyst for personal transformation that prompts individuals to re-evaluate their identity as well as corresponding issues such as relationships to family, relationships to country of origin, perceptions of the receiving country, and social interactions within school and community. In the United States, where European perspectives dominate the accepted worldview, many individuals find it increasingly difficult to resolve psychosocial conflicts amplified by the expected norms of the dominant social group. This paper investigates how these issues are salient even with individuals living in Kuwait. The paper explores psychosocial conflicts as it relates to race, class, and culture in adolescents living in Kuwait. Four case studies are analyzed in addressing the nature of identity construction and conflict resolution in home and school settings. The participants come from different backgrounds but are seen to display similar symptoms of identity confusion and all try to find similar ways to manage more than one identity.

Keywords:

Identity formation;
Multicultural;
Cultural relocation;
Migration and
identity; Social
integration and
belonging; Identity
confusion; Middle
East education

Introduction

Ethnic identity has been described as a template that is used to develop knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about a person's cultural background (Dana, 1993). It provides a basis for a person's behavior (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), through a framework within which a person

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perceives and defines objects, situations, events, and other people (Markstrom-Adams, 1992). Ethnicity is also viewed as a multidimensional construct with many definitions across disciplines, theoretical approaches, and research methods.

Cultural relocation can be seen as a catalyst for personal transformation that prompts individuals to re-evaluate their identity as well as corresponding issues such as relationships to family, relationships to country of origin, perceptions of the receiving country, and social interactions within school, community, and other social settings. In the United States, European perspectives dominate the accepted worldview, and many individuals find it increasingly difficult to resolve psychosocial conflicts amplified by the expected norms of the dominant social group.

This paper includes four case studies that are analyzed in addressing the nature of identity construction and conflict resolution in home and school settings. Each case study investigates how these issues are salient even with individuals living in Kuwait. The purpose of this study is to explore psychosocial conflicts as they relate to identity formation in adolescents living in Kuwait.

Acculturation, Ethnic Identity, and Cultural Contexts

Acculturation is defined as those changes individuals experience when they come into contact with another culture (Williams & Berry, 1991). These changes may be in behavior, values, attitudes, and even perceived identity.

The study of acculturation has a long history, and this term has been used in the social sciences as early as 1880 (Berry, 1980). However, the lack of consensus on the conceptualization and formal definition of acculturation becomes obvious when the works of various social scientists are reviewed. Each of these concepts has been viewed as part of the other (Redfield et al., 1936). For example, early researchers equated assimilation with acculturation and consequently, assimilation has been used interchangeably with acculturation.

Important Concepts

Acculturation. The change in behavior, values, cognitions and emotional responses occurring in people of one culture as a result of their interaction with another culture (Berry, 1980).

Acculturative Stress. The stress experienced by the individual in the process of acculturation, which may result in anxiety, depression, psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion (Williams & Berry, 1991).

Assimilation. A model in which the minority group becomes part of the majority or dominant group, thereby losing its uniqueness. Assimilation results in the minority group accepting and taking on the norms of the dominant group (Berry, 1980).

Culture. The sum total of ways of living developed by a group of human beings to meet biological and psychological needs. It refers to elements such as values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, folkways, behavior styles, and traditions that are linked together to form an integrated whole that functions to preserve the society (Leighton, 1982).

Ethnicity. A variable often denoted simply by the country or culture of origin, but it includes cultural heritage and ethnic identity. Ethnicity influences values, behaviors and feelings about the self, and is in turn influenced by situational variables (Rosenthal, 1987).

Kuwaiti. A person who holds the Kuwaiti citizenship, which is usually passed on through the male lineage. Place of birth does not determine citizenship. Kuwaitis, being a minority in their own country, fear a loss of dominance which in turn leads to extreme policies regarding the Kuwaiti nationality and citizenship. (Loew, 2007).

Kuwaitization. Making what is alien into Kuwaiti style, in all aspects of appearance. Foreigners, which are a majority in Kuwait, go through the process of Kuwaitization to fit in because of the privilege system.

Privilege System. The ideology that permits Kuwaitis to be entitled to more privileges than non-Kuwaitis by virtue of race.

Race. A biological term that takes on ethnic meaning when and if members of that biological group have evolved specific ways of living. It classifies people who have the same physical characteristics. Within a given racial group, there are great cultural differences depending on factors such as, region, history, and the realities to which people have to adapt (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Sexual Identity. Involves sexual orientation and styles of behavior indicative of the level of sexual competence and potential anxiety about sex that an individual has (Santrock, 2007).

Ethnic Identity and Cultural Context

During the last three or four decades, social scientists have become increasingly interested in the area of cultural contact. A major factor has been the increase in cross-cultural contacts, due largely to government intervention. An early influence was Stonequist (1935), who drew on the work of Park (1928) to publish a widely cited book called *The Marginal Man* that dealt with the problems encountered by persons caught between two cultural systems, not belonging to or being fully accepted by either group (Eitinger & Schwarz, 1981). Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935) developed the argument that individuals who live at the juncture between two cultures, and who can lay a claim to belonging to both cultures, either by being of mixed racial heritage or born in one culture and raised in a second, should be considered marginal people. Park (1928) suggested that marginality leads to psychological conflict, a divided self, and a disjointed person. Stonequist (1935) contended that marginality has certain social and psychological properties.

The social properties include factors of migration, racial (biological) difference, and situations in which two or more cultures share the same geographical area, with one culture maintaining a higher status than another (Stonequist, 1935). The psychological properties involve a state of what DuBois (1961) labeled *double-consciousness*, or the awareness of oneself as being a member and an alien of two or more cultures. This includes a “dual pattern of identification and a divided loyalty leading to an ambivalent attitude” (Stonequist, 1935, p. 96).

The common assumption, represented by the positions of Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935), is that living in two cultures is psychologically undesirable because managing the complexity of dual reference points generates ambiguity, identity confusion, and normlessness. However, Goldberg (1941) and Green (1947), in their responses to the marginal human theory, suggested that people who live within two cultures do not inevitably suffer. Both authors suggested that

being a “marginal person” is disconcerting only if the individual internalizes the conflict between the two cultures in which he or she is living (Goldberg, 1941; Green, 1947).

Goldberg perceived advantages to living at the border between two cultures. According to him, a marginal person (a) may share his or her condition with others of the same original culture; (b) engage in institutional practices that are shared by other marginal people; (c) experience no major blockage or frustrations associated with personal, economic, or social expectations; and (d) perceive himself or herself to be a member of a group (Goldberg, 1941).

One model for explaining the psychological state of a person living within two cultures assumes an ongoing process of absorption into the culture that is perceived as dominant or more desirable (Gordon, 1964). “The goal of the assimilation process is for a person to become socially accepted by members of the target culture as he or she moves through these stages. The underlying assumption of all assimilation models is that a member of one culture loses his or her original cultural identity as he or she acquires a new identity in a second culture.” This model leads to the hypothesis that an individual will suffer from a sense of alienation and isolation until he or she has been accepted and perceives that acceptance within the new culture (Johnston, 1976). This person will experience more stress, be more anxious, and suffer more acutely from social problems such as school failure or substance abuse than someone who is fully assimilated into that culture (Burnam et al., 1987).

Berry et al. (1987) in their consideration of the acculturation literature, developed a model that focuses on the process of group and individual adaptation within a pluralistic society. The authors report that there are four choices that the group or individual can make in such a situation: (1) assimilate by relinquishing cultural identity and socially disappearing into the dominant society; (2) integrate by maintaining cultural identity while also adopting some dominant society values; (3) separate where the individual withdraws from the dominant society and maintains original cultural identity; and (4) marginalize through alienation from both the cultural group/s as well as the dominant society.

Berry (1980) argues that individuals and groups in pluralistic societies have managed essentially two issues. One involves the decision to maintain one's culture of origin and the other is to engage in inter-group contact. Berry proposes an integration model, which allows the individual or ethnic groups to both engage in the activities of one culture while maintaining identity and relationships in another.

Identity Theory

Identity Development and Cultural Contexts

Historically, the concept of identity was not commonly used until recently when Erik H. Erikson in 1950 referred to the phrase in his well-known text, *Childhood and Society*. Indeed, Erikson's coinage of the terms identity and identity crisis was inspired by his own experiences with emigration, immigration, and Americanization process (Erikson, 1968). He was also influenced by a personal interest in psychoanalysis and his thoughts while attending art schools in Italy “in search of his own identity” (Muuss, 1996, p. 42). Nevertheless, Erikson's (1968) notions of identity and identity crisis arose out of his views of adolescent development, and not immigrant

adaptation, language, or creativity. Indeed, Erikson viewed identity crisis as a necessary turning point, a crucial moment when development must move one way or another, as the adolescent marshals resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation.

Recently, a number of studies have focused on identity development, namely racial or ethnic identity. These studies demonstrate the importance of identity to members of various cultural groups. Phinney and Alipuria (1990), for example, observed that students of color rated ethnicity as a central identity concern, equal to that of religion and of greater concern than politics. There was clear evidence of ethnic identity achievement, which was defined as a secure commitment to one's group, based on knowledge and understanding obtained through an active exploration of one's cultural experiences, and of moratorium, indicated by current involvement in exploration of one's ethnicity (Phinney, 1989).

Empirical work investigating the role of ethnicity in development has focused primarily on young children, where the central issue has been on the ways children acquire understanding and knowledge of the label for their particular cultural group as well as the attributes of that label (Aboud, 1987). Beyond childhood, concerns about ethnicity shift from learning one's ethnic label to understanding the significance of one's group memberships. In contrast, adolescents are faced with a number of changes that affect their understanding of the label assigned to their cultural group and are increasingly more aware of their social interactions as a result of their expanded cognitive abilities. These factors contribute to a greater awareness of current social issues and are thereby likely to make ethnicity salient for many adolescents-especially those of color (Gay, 1978).

In reference to adolescents, the question "Who am I?" is synonymous with cultural understanding of identity. Yet, only recently have social scientists begun to systematically examine the psychological implications of ethnicity and minority status as they contribute to an ethnic identity (Phinney, 1996). The developments that underlie the healthy identity development of children and adolescents are therefore likely to include awareness of one's own ethnic or cultural background. During adolescence in particular, the social networks of the individual widen, and thus make it possible to view the self from a third-person perspective, heightening one's sense of self. Broader intellectual horizons also make it likely that adolescents will recognize the existence of racial, ethnic, and sexual overtones in local and national issues. All these factors argue for ethnicity being a salient factor in identity development.

Recently, a number of studies have drawn attention to an additional domain of identity development, namely, racial or ethnic identity, and have demonstrated its importance to members of various ethnic and racial groups. Empirical work investigating the role of ethnicity in development has focused on young children, where the central issue has been the way in which children learn the label for their own group, and the attributes of that label (Aboud, 1987).

Phinney (1990) also provided evidence for ethnic identity diffusion, characterized by a lack of interest in or concern for ethnicity issues. One needs to have a clearer picture of early ethnic identity development and the childhood attitudes that preceded this before one examines the early traces of adolescent ethnic identity development. These attitudes are influenced by a number of contextual factors, such as parents and the ethnic community (Phinney, 1995).

Phinney's work has focused on the process of ethnic identity formation, the way in which individuals come to understand the implications of their ethnicity and to make decisions about its

role in their lives, regardless of the context of their involvement. Content and process are likely to be related, in that the process of exploration may lead to more positive attitudes, although the two can be distinguished conceptually. The ideal outcome of the identity development process is an achieved identity, characterized by a clear, confident sense of one's own ethnicity that is based on a firm commitment made after a period of exploration. Individuals with an achieved ego identity have resolved uncertainties about their future direction and have commitments that will guide future action (Marcia, 1980). In the area of ethnicity, identity achievement corresponds to acceptance and internalization of one's ethnicity. Cross (1978) used the term internalization for this end result wherein, ideally, "tension, emotionality, and defensiveness are replaced by a calm, secure demeanor. Ideological flexibility, psychological openness, and self-confidence about one's blackness are evident" (p. 18).

Conceptually, many social scientists have asserted that ethnic identity is crucial to self-concepts and the psychological functioning of individuals (Phinney, 1990). Many adolescents have not explored the meaning of their ethnicity. Moreover, if these young people have internalized negative societal stereotypes of their ethnic group, they are likely to experience lower self-esteem and self-confidence, and they may have difficulty in finding meaning in their lives. In an effort to understand themselves better, other teens may have come to question the meaning of their ethnic group membership. After the completion of a quest for meaning, some adolescents may come to understand the issues of ethnicity more clearly; in doing so they may come to know and to accept themselves more fully, and as a result, they may function more effectively.

Theories of social identity and self-esteem have suggested various social psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of ethnic self-images (Phinney, 1991; Porter & Washington, 1993; Rosenberg, 1979). Adolescents see and compare themselves to those around them in relation to the reference groups that most directly affect their experiences, based on their social similarity or dissimilarity with regard to such visible and socially categorized markers as gender, race, accent, language, class, religion, and nationality (Bernal & Knight, 1993; Phinney, 1991). Ethnic self-awareness is heightened or blurred, respectively, depending on the degree of dissonance or consonance of the social contexts, which are basic to identity formation. For adolescents in a consonant context, ethnicity is not salient, whereas contextual dissonance heightens the salience of ethnicity. In theory, self-esteem should be lower in dissonant social contexts, where the level of social dissimilarity is high along with exposure to negative stereotypes and reflected appraisals about one's group of origin (Rosenberg, 1970). The psychological pressure produced by such dissonance may lead the adolescent to cope by seeking to reduce conflict and assimilate into the relevant social context. Alternatively, the adolescent may cope through separating from the dissonant context, with a heightening and reaffirmation of ethnic solidarity and self-consciousness, as has occurred among Korean American adolescents in Los Angeles in the aftermath of the 1992 riots.

Ethnic identity is considered important, in part, because of its relationship to the psychological well-being of persons of color. Research on ego identity using the identity status paradigm has shown a strong relationship between higher stages of ego identity and positive psychological adjustment (Waterman, 1985). However, research on ethnic identity and adjustment is less conclusive. Studies examining the relationship between ethnic identity and self-

esteem have been inconsistent, with some showing a positive relationship and some showing no association. These discrepancies may be due in part to the widely differing methods used to assess ethnic identity, including ethnic customs and practices, attitudes towards one's group, or a sense of belonging (Phinney 1991). However, the few studies based on the racial identity of African American students have found racial identity to be associated with low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, and anxiety (Parham & Helms, 1985). These studies have also found that ethnic identity development among adolescents of color from various backgrounds is positively associated with self-evaluation and self-esteem (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990).

Identity in Kuwait

The Kuwaiti identity includes many different elements. There are two main parts to identity: personal identity, and cultural identity. Personal identity is the way an individual views himself, while cultural identity is the way an individual views himself according to a culture. Kuwaiti adolescents usually define themselves according to how they relate to the Kuwaiti culture, in the aspects of religion, gender, citizenship, and even social class. Gender is one of the biggest parts of identity in Kuwait, seeing as women were not granted civil rights and status, and therefore have different ideas about what it is to be a Kuwaiti than do Kuwaiti men (Guy, 1992; Mayer, 1995). Status also plays a leading role in identity formation; there are five levels of status in Kuwait, and they are based on wealth. Each level brings with it benefits and social rules that help maintain the social structure (Loew, 2007).

Due to cultural identity being such a big part of each Kuwaiti's personal identity, it is difficult to separate the two and judge foreigners fairly. According to one article, many Kuwaiti children are being raised to operate on the belief that Kuwaitis, due to simply belonging to the country of Kuwait, are morally superior despite being the minority in their own country. It is not uncommon to hear a misbehaving Kuwaiti child justify his actions by using the equivalent of the phrase, "I can do what I want, simply because I am a Kuwaiti." The belief, stemming mainly from the privilege system, is borne from childhood onwards, though in subtle actions rather than blatant paradoxical phrases. Even if a particular married couple opposes adopting a racist attitude towards foreigners, it still accepts that there's a nationwide opposition and sometimes manages to commit the same crimes it opposes, simply because the attitude seems so widespread (Fuzai, 2007).

Conceivably, there is more to cultural elitism than the privilege system. Every culture has its subcultures, which are based on lifestyle differences, social formations and class differences. In the Arab world, whichever culture controls the resources of society is the culture that is then dominant; hence, since the Kuwaiti nationality is not easily attained by non-Kuwaitis, a culture dominates the sub-cultures of Kuwait, and all the sub-cultures take precedence over any other nationality living in the country (Barakat, 1993).

Language and Cultural Identity

Language is perhaps the most frequently cited contributor to ethnic identity because it serves as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. It is used for reminding the group about its cultural heritage, for transmitting group feeling, and for excluding members of the out-group from

its internal transactions. In the United States, acquisition of English has been assumed to be essential for the integration of immigrants and their children into American society. In contrast, the value of keeping one's own language has been historically debated.

Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) noted, "Few of us... learn a second language as an end in itself... Mostly we learn second languages to gain access, through verbal interaction, to cultural dealings with people who lay claim to that language" (p. 161). Language is an integral aspect of culture and some studies suggest that by age six, children have already begun to develop their cultural identity (Hamers & Blanc, 1989). Acquiring the Kuwaiti accent is imperative to the development of a culture identity in Kuwait, and thus many Arab foreigners become bi-accented, in which they speak their own dialect as well as the Kuwaiti one. In Kuwait, in relation to language, the home environment – including foreign movies, foreign music, and foreign caregivers – is the primary source of cultural identity, but children's interactions within school also play an important secondary role in their development. The bi-accented child does not develop two separate cultural identities, however. Rather they are merged into one unique whole. The relationship between bilingualism and cultural identity is circular. Bilingualism affects cultural identity, which in turn affects further bilingual development (Hamers & Blanc, 1989).

Lambert (1987) acknowledges this phenomenon when he points out that research supports the belief that positive attitudes towards other ethnolinguistic groups have a correspondingly positive impact on acquisition of that group's language. It seems logical that successful experiences in that language would in turn promote opportunities for cross cultural understanding and thus foster positive associations with another culture.

When the child's environment places value on both cultures and permits dual cultural or ethnic membership, the child is able to integrate elements of both cultures into one harmonious whole. As Hamers and Blanc (1989) observed, "Bilingual experience influences ethnic attitudes... A perfectly balanced bilingual can be perceived as a member of either one of his ethnolinguistic groups provided that no non-linguistic ethnic clues interfere" (pp. 133-134). Hamers and Blanc (1989) suggested further that there are cultural identity characteristics of balanced bicultural bilinguals. Among these include positive identification with both cultural/ethnic communities, the valorization of both languages, perception of the relative status of both cultural groups as dynamic, and the perception of no apparent contradiction in dual group membership.

Lambert and Taylor (1990) noted that early bilingual and bicultural experiences produced not only bilingualism but also "changes in the realm of attitudes and ideas about inter-group coexistence" (p. 216). In studying the influence of "high-level skills in another group's language on students' attitudes and social perspectives," Lambert observed that the "social perspectives" of students were more expanded than those who experienced a more "conventional education" (p. 200; p. 218). Lambert also noted that students "asked more searching questions" in immersion situations than in a traditional program (p. 218). Furthermore, immersion students stressed the necessity for learning not only the language, but also the cultural group associated with that language. Thus, a strong connection is seen between language and culture.

Cultural Relocation and Identity

Research about new immigrants and refugees has focused largely on first-generation adults (Rumbaut, 1994). As a result, little is known about the children of immigrant and refugee families, even though they have a visible presence in schools and communities (and eventually will form a significant portion of US society). Rumbaut further noted that less is known about the subjective aspects of the children's experience, including their modes of ethnic or national self-identification, perceptions of discrimination, aspirations for the adult futures, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Rumbaut stated further that research is lacking on how these factors may be related to more objective indices of the immigrant children's experiences, such as their school and work performance, and language shifts from the mother tongue to English in given social contexts. Language, in particular, is the most frequently cited contributor to ethnic identity because it serves as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity: It is used for reminding the group about its cultural heritage, for transmitting group feeling, and for excluding members of the out-group from its internal transactions. In the United States, acquisition of English has been assumed to be essential for the integration of immigrants and their children into American society (Labov, 1998).

Research Methods and Discussion

Case Study One: Emma

Emma (a pseudonym) is a 19-year-old bilingual adolescent female who speaks both English and Arabic fluently. She appears to be underweight relative to her height and build, but always mentions the fact that this is the typical Canadian body. She was born and raised in Canada until the age of 8, and carries a dual Canadian-Kuwaiti passport; however, her parents are both of Kuwaiti heritage and both carry the Kuwaiti passport. At the age of 8 she moved to Kuwait with her parents, one younger brother, and a younger sister. She currently lives with her immediate family in Kuwait and studies English Literature in Kuwait University.

Emma lives in a family that holds on to their Kuwaiti cultural traditions and customs very tightly. They are not as open-minded as Canadians when it comes to the genders mixing; gender segregation is a big part of Kuwaiti culture. Their children are not allowed to attend parties, nor have friends from the opposite gender; they are not allowed to talk to peers from the opposite gender on the phone and they are beaten if they are found to have done so. Due to the cultural belief that women need to be more reserved than men, Emma's brother, although younger, has more freedom to stay out late or sleep over at his friends' just because he is a male. However, Emma's first 8 years in Canada weren't as restrictive. She attended a co-educational school with lots of male and female friends. She found her freedom in school where she could do all she wanted to do. She had male friends in school and found it extremely normal to be around them, although her parents made it clear this behavior was not allowed. Though Emma could interact with the opposite gender in school, cultural rules state that no contact is to be made outside of school for any reason. The assumption is that friendships can only exist between people of the same gender.

Emma's struggles began after she moved to Kuwait; her parents placed her in an all-girls' British school, where almost all the girls in her class were Kuwaitis. She says that her first few years in school were so hard, because when she mentioned that she had lived in a Western culture, her classmates and peers assumed she had no morals, as a consequence of having fewer dress and behavioral restrictions as well as fewer differences in gender-related expectations. Emma internalized the conflict between the two cultures in which she was living, which was disconcerting for her (Goldberg, 1941; Green, 1947). She found it extremely hard to blend in and make friends. Her academic achievements deteriorated, and she found it hard to concentrate in her studies. She suffered from symptoms of depression, helplessness and low self-confidence. Her parents didn't make it any easier for her, since their rules were strict and counterproductive. Emma's bi-cultural experience started to create conflict. She felt the urge to fit in and satisfy her parents, who believed that you should act according to the culture you are in, and not necessarily the one you are from. Therefore, Emma had to re-evaluate her morals and act in a manner that would not taint the family name.

With time, Emma started adapting to the Kuwaiti culture but was extremely aggressive when people said she was Kuwaiti (according to her citizenship); she would always say she was Canadian. She hated identifying as a Kuwaiti because of the many contradictions she faced in Kuwait, especially when juxtaposed with her Canadian identity. She refused to take Arabic classes like all the other Arabic students, although she spoke Arabic fluently. Instead, she applied for Arabic classes for foreigners.

Case Study 2: Adel

Adel (a pseudonym) is an 18-year-old bilingual adolescent male who speaks both Kuwaiti Arabic and Egyptian Arabic fluently (and some English). He is originally from Egypt but lived almost his entire life in Kuwait. His father is fully Egyptian and his mother is originally from Egypt yet she received the Kuwaiti nationality at a very young age from her father. Since childhood, his parents placed him in an Arabic, all-Kuwaiti school. Currently he is enrolled in an Arabic high school for Kuwaitis only (he was eligible due to his mother's Kuwaiti nationality). He imitates Kuwaitis in their looks; he dresses like them, styles his hair like them, and speaks their accent when he's around them. This is his understanding of fitting in; he says that if he didn't speak Kuwaiti, his friends would look down on him.

In school, Adel says that he is capable of much more than he is achieving. He says he is the cleverest amongst all the students there. He says that the Arabic schools for Kuwaitis are designed with an easy school syllabus so that Kuwaitis can pass with high grades without much of an effort. He says that throughout his school years he knew he could do so much more but didn't. However, he envied his cousins for being in English schools with more opportunities.

Adel's struggles began at a very early age in his life; he says he felt "different" since childhood because he carries the Egyptian passport and everyone else in his class was purely Kuwaiti. When asked to describe his friends, he said they are Kuwaitis, so obviously they are happy in their lives and don't care about their studies. They have everything. He then said he feels that if not for his Kuwaiti accent, he would've never made friends. But, when he's around his cousins and Egyptian friends, he feels he is not accepted because he looks like a Kuwaiti, and Kuwaitis are not really

valued by Egyptians. He says he struggles to maintain two identities depending on the person's nationality sitting in front of him. He also says that over the years, his relationship with Kuwaitis has become closer than his relationship from people from his motherland. This is because he had gained a lot of Kuwaiti qualities which non-Kuwaitis don't like, such as dressing in expensive clothes and being materialistic. The fact that he doesn't speak good English has also made him feel inferior to others in his family.

Adel mentions the fact that he finds it extremely hard to prove himself amongst other relatives and friends who are in English schools, because the educational system in his school is weak. Every time he talked about becoming an engineer, people would laugh at him and say he couldn't do it or he would drop out after the first semester. He also mentioned that he can't wait to go to a university to prove to everyone that they are wrong.

At home Adel's parents speak the Egyptian dialect and cannot be described as Kuwaitis in their cultural traditions. However, Adel's mother speaks Kuwaiti and acts like one amongst Kuwaitis. Adel is duplicating his mother with his constant use of the Kuwaiti accent, for she prefers the Kuwaiti accent over the Egyptian one as well.

Currently, Adel says he is doing great in school and can't wait to go to a university to prove to all his friends that he is more than they think he is. He is trying to get away from the need to fit in and to be a Kuwaiti.

Case Study 3: Mirna

Mirna (a pseudonym) is an 18-year-old adolescent female, who studies Medicine in Kuwait University. Mirna has been raised by a father who is originally from Egypt. The father has lived all his life in Kuwait and received the Kuwaiti nationality about 8 years ago. The mother is a patriotic Egyptian mother who has lived her life in Egypt and moved to Kuwait after marriage. She has refused to get her husband's Kuwaiti nationality to be passed on to her despite the Kuwaiti nationality carrying many privileges. The mother has not related to the Kuwaiti culture. Mirna's mother refused to give birth to her in Kuwait so she traveled to Egypt to give birth. A few months after that, Mima was brought back to Kuwait where she has spent almost her entire life. Mima has one younger brother and one younger sister, who were also born in Egypt, and for whom she feels responsible.

As a child Mirna was placed in an English co-educational school amongst people from all nationalities. She was purely Egyptian back then, and she didn't know how to speak anything but Egyptian and says that she didn't really understand what different nationalities meant as nobody really talked about it. Mirna stayed in this school until the age of 9 when her parents started to dislike the deterioration in educational level of the school and decided to move her to an all girls' school.

In the new school, Mirna felt she was in another world. There were no different nationalities; everybody was Kuwaiti except for one or two people in her class. She still remembers her first day in school, when the Egyptian Arabic teacher came in and asked them to write an essay. Mirna volunteered to read hers to the class. After she read her essay, the teacher hugged her and told her it was the first time she had seen someone so good in Arabic, and then she asked her if she was Egyptian. Mirna told her she was, so the teacher started treating her in a more preferential way.

It wasn't long before all the teachers liked Mirna and all her friends started using her. They would ask her to help them in their homework, but she felt extremely different. A year later, Mirna's father received the Kuwaiti nationality, and whenever this was known, people would acknowledge that she was but make the distinction that she was not purely Kuwaiti. Mirna struggled with getting people to like her for who she was and not what she could do for the girls in her class. As a result, she learned to speak the Kuwaiti dialect and with time she could speak as fluently as everybody else. She pretended to be Kuwaiti because of her awareness of the privilege system and used the Kuwaiti nationality and accent to boost her sense of self. Since then, Mirna has started to treat everybody equally. She is still Egyptian at heart and at home amongst her family; however, in school she was more aggressive. Whenever someone told her they were better than she because they were Kuwaiti, she would say "So what, I am too." Mirna used the Kuwaiti nationality and accent for her own benefit, yet her behavior in school was totally different from the person that she was. She struggled to keep her personal/cultural identity through high school, but these problems seemed to fade away when she entered university and made friends of different nationalities. She now refuses to associate with Kuwaitis, although they're the dominant nationality in her University. She says when she is among different nationalities, she is in her comfort zone. University was a way for Mirna to escape dual identity.

Case Study 4: Mohammad

Mohammad (a pseudonym) is a 21-year-old Kuwaiti-Algerian male who studies business administration in the Gulf University. He speaks fluent English and weak Arabic. Mohammad was born in America and lived 18 years of his life there. He lives with his parents and is an only child. When told about the topic of the interview he said, "I can't relate to my Algerian side at all, although my mom is, I have never been there and my mum is more Americanized than Algerian or Kuwaiti." His father is a traditional Kuwaiti man; however, Mohammed is not influenced by him. He says that he is closer to his mother than his father, and this is why he never really learned how to speak proper Kuwaiti. He was born in America and spent 18 years in a school where his friends were from different nationalities. Due to the fact that he was raised with them, he didn't have any problems blending in. He has spoken English since he was born and speaks English better than Arabic. He dressed like an American, ate American food, inherited the American culture and didn't know what it felt like to be Kuwaiti.

Mohammad mentioned the fact that he didn't pray or fast when he was in America. He knew very little about his own religion and at home religion wasn't mentioned that much. He saw his mother pray sometimes, but he never saw the significance of it. He said he never made Muslim friends. Up to that point, Mohammad's personal identity did not include the Muslim religion or the Arabic language.

Mohammad says he was OK until he graduated from high school. After graduation, his father then said that they had to return to Kuwait due to some problems he had at work. Mohammad tried to convince his dad to leave him in a university in America, but he refused. So, he returned with his parents to Kuwait. Mohammad applied to Gulf University to study business. He's in his third year and is finding it extremely hard to blend in with Kuwaitis. He says he can't relate to them. Whenever he tries speaking Arabic, they tease him and tell him he's better off speaking

English. Consequently, he has stopped trying. He says it's more comfortable speaking English than humiliating himself trying to speak Arabic. What was totally different for him when he came to Kuwait was the fact that everyone around him was Muslim. They prayed, they fasted, and he learned how to do so through some friends. He says he still can't maintain five prayers a day and can't fast the full holy month, but at least he has learned how to cope.

Mohammad says he can't really change at this age, so he is trying his best to blend in at the university while being himself at home. Mohammad needed to adapt to a cultural identity of a practicing Muslim Arab, because his personal identity came from another culture. His future plan is to travel back to America as soon as he graduates from the university.

Analysis of Four Case Studies

Extensive collection of data, which include one-on-one interviews and questionnaires, accompanied each case study. The recurring themes that follow and that were noted by this process were, in most instances, consistent. The research done on this topic and the methods used (such as questionnaires and individual interviews) to obtain information provide accuracy and detail. The interview questions tackled the issues of identity from all angles to give a more comprehensive view of the topic. The researchers have tried to eliminate any factors that maybe seen as bias in this research, the information in the cases has come from the participants themselves, who volunteered and gave informed consent after a discussion on confidentiality in which they were told that all pieces of information, as well as the participants' identities, will be kept confidential, and that withdrawal at any time during the study is permitted.

Living in Two Worlds (Kuwaiti and Non-Kuwaiti)

In the case of Emma, she was feeling like she was caught between the conflicting values of two cultures and felt committed to both. The first culture is the one in which she lived for eight years; it's the place that made her happy and allowed her to build a personality of her own. In that culture, there is all she ever wished for and she is always caught up in the idea of wanting to go back. She would go out on dates in defiance of her parents for the fun of it. However, Emma's commitment to her family always made her feel guilty about what she was doing. Also, her parents were a source of fear, as they used to hit her whenever she was caught doing something against their will. The Canadian culture differs totally from Kuwaiti culture in values; therefore, Emma often felt it difficult to feel a sense of sameness with people in her school who had different values.

Adel lived all his life in Kuwait; however, there were always the conflicting worlds of his Kuwaiti friends from school and his non-Kuwaiti friends and cousins outside school. His sense of wanting to fit in always led him to a conflict. His role in school was different than his role outside school. In school he didn't want to feel different and that was the reason he spoke using the Kuwaiti dialect and acted like everybody else. However, what he did in school to blend in was rejected by people from outside. His behavior was looked down on. He tried hard to be different but it became extremely difficult.

Although Mirna seems quite settled right now, when she was in school, she also lived in two different worlds. At home she lived amongst a family that lives by the Egyptian traditions and customs. To please her Egyptian mother she wouldn't speak Kuwaiti dialect at home and avoided

talking to Kuwaiti friends on the phone when her mother was around. However, in school she didn't want to feel less than others and didn't want to be used by people, so she spoke like them and acted like them in order to fit in.

Mohammad seemed to live in one world at home and a second world at the university. In the university he tries as much as possible to blend in with his friends, yet at home he finds it easy to be himself.

In all four cases the conflicted views of themselves has led to internal conflicts. Emma's view of herself differs from that of the Canadian world and also differs from that of her parents and friends in school. Mohammad's view of himself inside school is different from that at home. Adel's view of himself inside school and outside school is also totally different. Mirna's view of herself inside school varies from that inside her house and all of these contrasting identity concepts create internal chaos. The perceptions and views that they all once knew to be valid had shifted to create a more tentative sense of identity. All the participants fit into Berry's theories of assimilation and acculturation. However, though all four participants went through assimilation, only two – Adel and Mirna – managed to reach acculturation.

Attempt to Combine Race, Language and Culture

Emma and Mohammad discussed their feelings about being in a foreign country. They both talked about their relations with people who are Canadian/American born and had a similar ethnic background. They both focused on the feeling being “different.” Emma became aware of how she is different from others in terms of language, dress, and physical characteristics, while Mohammad's main difference was in term of language.

Emma attempted to adapt by making sense of the Kuwaiti culture and trying as much as she could to differentiate between what is allowed in her birth culture and what's not. Mohammad attempted to assimilate by making sense not only of the culture but also the religion that is dominant in Kuwait.

Emma's and Mohammad's ethnic exploration resulted from their growing awareness of the conflict between the values and attitudes of the dominant society. Emma felt more restricted in Kuwait. She didn't have any other option, and she didn't think she had many alternatives for the future. However, Mohammad believes that this identity conflict he's experiencing right now is temporary and he can soon go back to what he calls the normal life of living in America.

Mirna and Adel lived all their life in Kuwait and therefore were highly aware of what the Kuwaiti culture is about. Adel lived among Kuwaitis since childhood, which is why he made sense of this culture and language, and these factors led him to realize the differences between himself and other students in school. Mirna's two different experiences in two different schools, and the way Kuwaitis looked at her, gave her an understanding of the Kuwaiti culture. With time, both Adel and Mirna could speak the Kuwaiti dialect fluently.

Pride in dual modes of communication. Adel repeatedly expressed throughout the interview that he was proud about being bi-accented; his choice of words whenever he said he could speak both dialects repeatedly reflected this. What is also extremely visible is his pride of knowing some English. He twice mentioned the fact that he learned English on his own.

Heightened awareness of language and culture. Emma, Mohammad, Mirna and Adel all had a heightened awareness of culture which was based on their desire to feel accepted and the need to feel “equal to” and less inferior to the dominant culture. When Emma first came to Kuwait, she immediately became aware of the fact that the Kuwaiti culture has extremely different values that she had to follow if she wanted to become accepted by both friends and parents at home. When Mohammad first came to Kuwait, the first thing he became alerted to was the dominant religion, He says he could hear the prayer calls, which he wasn't used to, and that was the first thing he realized about this culture. The religious differences and how strict society is about religion is something that is evident in Mohammad's opinion about the society's expectations.

Mirna's and Adel's heightened awareness of the language was clear because at school they were both very aware of the differences in language and its effects. They both said that Kuwaitis looked down on them because they were speaking in different dialects. However, when both Adel and Mirna started speaking with the Kuwaiti dialect, they became more accepted.

Kuwaitis and Non-Kuwaitis

Emma is not sociable; she says that in school she managed to make a small group of friends and those were the only people with whom she sat during school breaks or went out with on weekends. She says that with this small group she was so intimate and was there for them all the time. However, her dealings with other people in her school were minimal, as she only talked to them when she had to. Her relationships with her teachers were very good; she says they had an extremely positive impression about her. However, Emma mentioned the fact that her relationship with her family and extended family is not very good. She does not like them because they always find something negative about her to point out.

Mirna saw her behavior within school as helping others to actualize a more peaceful co-existence. She believed people should be accepted for who they are, but couldn't really apply this, although she says that she had good relationships with everyone, inside and outside school. She even mentioned her pride in being a friend of her teachers.

Mohammad had difficulties making any friend. He says that Kuwaitis are very discriminatory if you are not like them. He says that he lost his temper more than once due to the fact that people tease him about his accent. He says he doesn't really have a good relationship with people.

Adel says he has a good relationship with most people; the fact that he speaks two dialects has enhanced his relationships. He says there are still a few people who look down on him, but that number has decreased a lot.

Desire to Acquire Access to and Opportunity in the Minority Language and Culture

Adel has mentioned the fact that he entered the school he was in by using his mother's nationality and he's currently using her to overcome all the obstacles that are put forward in front of foreigners to get his driving license. He also mentioned that he'll be using his mother to enter Kuwait University as it's a university for Kuwaiti nationals only.

Mirna, whose Kuwaiti nationality has been passed on to her through her father, mentioned that this nationality is extremely beneficial for her. It helped her get into Kuwait University, and

her future plans are dependent on it, since she wants to continue her Masters and PhD's with a scholarship from the ministry.

General Discussion

Due to different circumstances (be it language, culture, or values), Emma, Adel, Mirna, and Mohammad weren't able to construct an identity supportive of their socio-emotional needs. The extent to which each of them has reached in creating an identity is dependent upon whether they are accepted in the environment around them. In turn, this has gotten them to become content with themselves. While each participant was using his/her experience with the Kuwaiti culture to make decisions about who to become and which language/accent to adopt, individual choices differed depending on the level of support or positive feedback received.

Of the four cases, Mohammad saw the least need to change himself and his identity to fit in his university. He seemed to find it useless trying to fit in at this age; instead, he planned his future away from Kuwait and these plans got him to build a wall between his own life and the university life. He didn't try his best to fit in knowing that once he graduates he will go back to the "normal" life he always knew. Therefore, Mohammad became the exception due to his age; his identity was too developed for him to feel the need to change it to fit in for a short period of time, and yet even he wasn't completely immune, because he adopted some aspects of the accepted cultural identity to learn to manage in Kuwait. Mohammad continued to experience acculturative stress so great that he could not change or adapt to the culture.

Emma faced a lot of difficulty constructing a positive identity. The cultural values she had been accustomed to since childhood, coupled with the Kuwaiti culture creating multiple social challenges, caused her a lot of stress. In turn, these factors have caused her academic performance to deteriorate. Her parents seemed to place more pressure on her, giving her fewer choices about what her future could be. She didn't get much flexibility to create the identity she wanted, as it seemed that her identity is forced on her by her family and society. The lack of freedom Emma experienced actually helped her achieve a cultural identity, despite it conflicting greatly with her personal identity. Emma's parents enforced their Kuwaiti values so strongly that Emma went through Kuwaitization after her parents' example. Though Emma developed a cultural identity, she still experiences acculturative stress due to the fact that her personal identity clashed completely with her cultural one.

Mirna and Adel seemed to have more space as to what they can be. This is because they were not raised in a home that adheres to the Kuwaiti values and cultural rules. However, their confusion started once they started interacting with Kuwaitis. Through their schools and environment they learned that if they weren't similar to Kuwaitis in some way, people would look down on them, even if they carried Kuwaiti passports or had a Kuwaiti parent. Their experiences emphasized the importance of the Kuwaiti accent and how it helps them to fit into the Kuwaiti society. Both Adel and Mirna created an identity that will help them fit in; however, Mirna still found it more comfortable being around people who are non-Kuwaitis. By adapting to the Kuwaiti culture as well as their own, Adel and Mirna both achieved acculturation and manage to live between two cultures in relative comfort.

In the four cases we see that all participants are trying to co-exist. They are trying to create an identity that fits both their learned values and the discriminatory world that is around them. They haven't all built an identity that makes them necessarily happy or proud of themselves; yet, they have created an identity that can help them co-exist in the country in which they live. All of the participants have eventually become bi-accented simply to survive. Conversely, all of the participants, though eager to fit in with the Kuwaiti culture, ultimately removed themselves from the pressures of that culture to an environment in which they could further develop their personal identities, seeing as living in two cultures is complicated and, in these cases, has generated identity confusion.

The idea behind this paper is to add to literature about Kuwait. Not much research has been done about Kuwait, especially psychological research, so this is a preliminary step to add awareness in Kuwait and other surrounding nations. Adolescents look to written literature and research done about their country to form a sense of self and community; the fact that there is hardly any literature in Kuwait, especially in terms of identity and identity formation, can have a harmful effect on the adolescents of the country, and their family members. With the information gathered in this research, we hope to educate and inform, as well as to encourage others to continue this trend and provide more information on Kuwait.

Unfortunately, this research included only four cases, which is not enough. The four cases could be an exception rather than rule, and more research needs to be done to eliminate doubt. Examining more cases can influence the generation of more theories or, conversely, the elimination of existing theories. Furthermore, to provide a more objective and comprehensive view, research could have been done on the Kuwaiti perspective, as well as the perspective of the guardians of the case participants. Hopefully, more research will emerge elaborating on the information that is lacking in this study.

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